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Fenianism and naval affairs  
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# FENIANISM AND NAVAL AFFAIRS


By JOHN DE COURCY IRELAND, M.A., PH.D.

THIS can be but a preliminary study of a much neglected aspect of the Fenian struggle. It is possible to present it in the form of a pioneering voyage into uncharted historical waters because the Maritime Institute of Ireland was approached last year to carry out a reconnaissance research project on the subject for *Éire-Ireland*, the distinguished journal of the Irish American Cultural Institute, St. Paul, Minnesota. The Institute's assistant research officer Mr. J. Wolohan, Mr. Walter McGrath of the *Cork Examiner*, Mr. Seán Ó Luing, author of *Freemantle Mission*, and Mr. Marcus Bourke, whose long-awaited study of Fenianism is appearing this year, have all been assiduous for many weeks in helping me, and are deserving of the deepest thanks from all interested in the subject.

The best known associations of Fenianism with naval affairs are the belated despatch of a ship *Erin's Hope*, to bring arms and volunteers in support of the 1867 rising, and the financing of the Clare Fenian inventor J. P. Holland, one of the select band of nineteenth century pioneer designers of submarines. I shall say a few words about these first.

O'Donovan Rossa deals with the *Erin's Hope* on pp. 302-3 of his *Irish Rebels in English Prisons*, Denieffe in *Recollections of the Irish Revolutionary Brotherhood*, pp. 208-11, has more to say of it. Father D'Arcy's *Fenian Movement in the U.S.*, 1858-86 treats of it. A pamphlet issued (undated) by the Catholic Truth Society of Ireland and written by M. J. O'Mullane, M.A., *The Cruise of the "Erin's Hope" or Gun-Running in '67*, claims to be "strictly authentic, being founded on the report of the expedition furnished to the Central Executive of the Fenian Brotherhood" by the ship's commander on her return and is the longest account I know; extremely interesting, it has to be treated with reserve on occasion. The Commission issued to the ship's second in command by the Chief of Naval Affairs of the Brotherhood (O'Mahony-Savage wing) is in the National Museum, where Mr. Snoddy, another tireless contributor to the Maritime Institute's research efforts, showed it to me along with the testimonial signed by the 35 volunteers on board to Captain Kavanagh and his officers on May 24, 1867 in Sligo Bay, both documents having been received at the Museum from a Mr. Ward in New York in 1924. There is more to be read about the voyage in Rutherford's *Fenian Conspiracy*, and the *London Times* of 21 August 1867 reprinted from the *New York Times* an account "of the 92-day cruise of the Fenian ship *Plato* (Captain James M'Groom) from New York to Ireland and back", for the truth of which the New York paper had vouched, which seems at first sight to be the *Erin's Hope* story. In *The Gentle Country* (The Kerryman, undated), Nicholas Whittle, a soldier of the war of independence, gives (p. 16, p. 136) the account from eyewitnesses of the landing and capture of a number of the Fenian ship's passengers. There is an account of what seems to have been an attempt to rescue four of these men in the *Illustrated London News* of 22.vi.1867.

Irish sword  
Dublin 2, Ireland  
Summer 1967, to 3



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In *The Turn of the Tide* (Irish Shipping Ltd., 1962) Basil Peterson writes (p. 104) "The whole affair was grossly mismanaged and resulted in a complete fiasco". One might modify this assessment by asserting that it was, like another "fiasco", magnificent but not war.

The *Erin's Hope* was a brigantine which appears to have been of 115 tons gross, 138 deadweight, built at Medford, Mass. in 1861, and registered in 1866 in Nassau, Bahamas. Her owner, one Dawes, was apparently using her to run arms to the Mexican Republicans in revolt against their foreign-imposed emperor Maximilian Habsburg. When she arrived in New York with 5,000 stand of arms, 3 field guns and ammunition, labelled as machinery and pianos destined for Cuba (then a Spanish colony in an attempt to liberate which Rossa's friend General Washington Ryan, hero of another blockade-running episode, a strong Fenian sympathizer, lost his life in 1873<sup>1</sup>), nobody claimed the cargo, and the ship fell to the port collector of customs. Though not Irish, he handed her to the Fenians, presumably for a consideration.

The ship was still called the *Jacknell* when she was boarded by Commander Kavanagh, of Waterford origin, Lieut. William Sweetman, Ensign Henry O'Neill, seamen Thomas Hardy, John O'Connor, Andrew White, James Lawless, cook-steward John Mullen, and cabin-boy John O'Connor. Still flying the British ensign she sailed, and was joined by a steam ferry from which the 35 volunteer soldiers, led by Brigadier Kerrigan and including the inevitable informer D. J. Buckley and the enthusiastic Fenian Orangeman and mason, engineer Colonel S. R. Tresilian, who later lectured in the U.S.A. about the trip, and died there in January 1869, embarked aboard her.

Eight days out, on Easter Sunday, April 21, 1867, the ship was renamed *Erin's Hope*, and a Fenian Sunburst and green ensign with gold harp were hoisted to a salute of guns. The ship had covered 1,200 miles since leaving Colonel Kelly and Naval Chief John Powell, organizers of the affair, in New York. When she ran into bad weather her sails were all in a poor state and progress was delayed, but she reached Donegal Bay on May 10. Shore signals were expected but not seen. It was hoped that the insurgents would be holding a considerable area of Ireland and indeed that by now the U.S. government would have been induced by Fenian sympathizers to recognize them as belligerents, whereupon they hoped the U.S. Fenians would organize "swarms of privateers" to "steal out of American ports and prey upon British commerce" (*Illustrated London News*, 11.iv.1867). Unfortunately, the rebellion was over and there was no hope of seizing Sligo, their first intention.

Colonel Ricard O'Sullivan Burke (of Manchester rescue and Clerkenwell Prison fame, who had been four years at sea, 1856-60, and was later Chicago Harbour Master) eventually came out in a cutter, explained how the arrangement for signal contact with the ship had broken down, and directed her to Toe Head, Co. Cork, where new instructions were to be received. Meanwhile one of the Fenian soldiers and seaman O'Connor had been injured in an accident. They were sent ashore with a landing party under Lieut. Nugent, who was also to

1 See Marbán y Leiva, *Historia de Cuba*, Tomo II (La Habana, 1945), p. 414.





pick up two of the volunteers put ashore earlier, the ship having no proper medical equipment. The volunteers could not be found, and Nugent was left ashore with the injured men. O'Connor died soon after. This was on May 25-6.

When the ship got under way she was apparently in some danger of interception by a British warship, called up by coastguards suspicious of her behaviour. Some stories claim this was H.M.S. *Black Prince* and that Kavanagh made ready to run alongside her and Tresilian to blow both up. This seems unlikely. H.M.S. *Black Prince* was one of Britain's first pair of ironclads (flagship of the Irish Station in 1867), a ship that had cost £330,114 and had been, in 1860, her hurried response to the revolutionary French *Gloire*, the world's first ironclad which for a few months could have challenged the whole British Channel Fleet.

No contact could be made with Fenians ashore from Toe Head, and Kavanagh sailed his ship along the Co. Cork coast for some days. Discontent grew on board. There was a 2 to 1 majority vote to return to U.S.A., but on June 1 another change of plan led to the placing of 31 men in a fishing smack off Helvick Head. They were to land after nightfall, get in touch with local Fenians, and arrange for them to receive the *Erin Hope's* arms cargo after an appropriate signal had been exchanged. Unfortunately the men landed in daylight, on Ring Strand outside the pier at Ballinagoul (a little distance from the dignified monument that now commemorates the event), and were spotted by suspicious coastguards. Twenty-eight were arrested within a short while, tried and given heavy sentences. Tresilian, left aboard to supervise the discharge ashore of the arms, never got a chance to do so, and after the interval fixed, and a further delay to allow for all eventualities, Kavanagh was asked by Kerrigan to set sail for the U.S. The *Erin's Hope* reached New York on August 1, with a number of those aboard sick. Kavanagh claimed that while searching for him H.M.S. *Revenge* (gunboat) was lost on Daunt's Rock, H.M.S. *Lapwing* (gunboat) in Killala Bay, and a smaller gunboat off Cape Clear.

I can find no evidence for these claims. There was no gunboat *Revenge*, only a screw line-of-battle ship of that name that was intact a few weeks later when part of the squadron that greeted the Sultan of Turkey at Spithead. (She was never on the Irish Station in 1867.) The *Lapwing* was one of a series of gunboats with bird names built and building in the late 1860's. The *Lapwing* herself was under construction at Devonport in June 1867, and was not launched till November. The British Admiralty Library have no record of any of H.M. ships wrecked off the Irish coast in 1867. (For these facts I am most grateful to Miss Vivienne Heath of the Admiralty Library for her most patient and careful researches.)

Nor have I found much evidence that the British were searching specifically for the *Erin's Hope*.<sup>\*</sup> Indeed the only public pronouncements made by the Admiralty during Kavanagh's sojourn off our coast were one about a "punitive" attack by H.M.S. *Cormorant* (*Lapwing* class gunboat) on "the savages" of Formosa, two about the alleged scratching of the broad-arrow on a midshipman's nose in H.M.S. *Phoebe*, and a circular forbidding "whiskers of such inordinate length and size as to resemble beards" on board H.M. ships.

<sup>\*</sup> But see documents quoted in footnote at the end of this article.









THE "ERIN'S HOPE" SALUTING THE GREEN FLAG.







Not that there had not long been alarm in high places about the possibility of Fenian gun-runners slipping into Irish waters. As early as October 4, 1865 the *Freeman's Journal* reported a rumour that the London steamer *Lois* had passed a large armed cruiser, flying the Fenian flag, near Roche's Point—and the indignant denial of her master, Captain Holland. On December 12, 1866, the *Irish Times* reported the seizure in the Medway the day before of a large three-masted screw steamer, in which arms were discovered, assumed to be destined for Ireland. In February 1867, following the premature outbreak in Munster and the despatch of H.M.S. *Gladiator* to Cahirciveen, 600 marines were sent from Portsmouth and Plymouth to Cobh, and H.M.S. *Vestal*, *Hind*, *Rainbow*, *Caledonia*, *Black Prince*, *Netley* and *Trinculo*, followed by bigger craft, the ironclad frigates *Hector* and *Lord Clyde* and the frigate *Bellerophon*, were ordered into Irish waters (*Irish Times*, 18.ii.67).

As late as November 1867 the *Glasgow Herald* was publishing news of a supposed interception of a "Fenian privateer" in Lough Swilly. Still more startling rumours reached Britain from time to time from across the Atlantic, such as the report reprinted in the London *Times* of 17.ii.1866 from the *Journal du Havre* that on January 20 the former U.S.S. *Fort Morgan*, a fast 1,200-ton gunbrig, had sailed as a Fenian privateer under the name *Cuba*. Since the abortive *Ocean Spray* expedition to Campo Bello in the Spring of 1866 (of which more later) there had been very many reports of Fenian vessels on voyage for most of the British colonies on the American continent, all, alas, untrue, as John Powell and his comrades in the Irish-American Fenian organization clearly had desires considerably greater than their capabilities. Absurdest of all these stories was the one that arose from the first ever transatlantic yacht race, won by Gordon Bennett's *Henrietta*, which reached Cowes on Christmas Day, 1866 from New York. *Henrietta* and her two rivals had been suspected of being disguised Fenian cruisers, and the winner's sailing master of being former Head Centre James Stephens himself.<sup>2</sup>

One point remains to be examined. I have already mentioned the New York *Times* story of a Fenian blockade-runner *Plato*. It is too like what is known of the *Erin's Hope* story not to give rise to strong suspicions that it is a dressed-up version of the same. Yet there are enough discrepancies to leave doubts. If there really was a Fenian blockade-runner *Plato*, the naval history of 1867 will be found to have gone through a process strangely similar to that of 1916. For years we believed implicitly the tale of the captain of the *Libau-Aud* and systematically depreciated the worth of Captain Weisbach of U19. The researches of the Maritime Institute in 1965-6 ought to have corrected this error. Perhaps we have for years been blowing up the *Erin's Hope* incident and neglecting a much more significant one.

If the New York *Times* report is to be accepted, the *Plato* had a crew of 40 and carried "350 Fenians, picked from the various circles and thoroughly armed with the Springfield rifle and supplied with a large quantity of ammunition and warlike stores." The *Plato* is said to have been off Newfoundland on May 2

<sup>2</sup> See *The Great Yacht Race*, Rayner and Wykes (Peter Davies, 1966), pp. 14-15.







and displayed U.S. colours to a British warship. Nothing of this in the *Erin's Hope* version, and the courses followed differ. The *Plato* sighted Tory on May 23, the day the *Erin's Hope*, after nearly a fortnight cruising in and out of Donegal Bay, set course for Sligo to seize it. The *Plato* is said to have provisioned at Tory, and been welcomed by inhabitants who, however, knew little of the U.S. Fenians. They next sent a party ashore at the Old Head of Kinsale, but put out to sea when warned of the approach of a British frigate. She later slipped into Bantry Bay by night "passing under the nose of an English man-of-war without being questioned, contacted local Fenians, and sailed before daybreak". On June 6 they are declared to have landed a number of men on the Waterford coast "six of whom were shortly after captured by the English constabulary of Wexford". The locality is much the same as that of the *Erin's Hope's* final adventure, but date and number involved do not correspond. *Erin's Hope* reports nothing of a visit to the Antrim coast later in June, a meeting with Fenian leaders in Belfast Lough, who advised abandonment of all hope of a landing, nor of a visit to Cobh before setting course for the U.S.A. But these are supposed to have been the closing episodes of the *Plato's* incursion into Irish waters, which is said to have lasted 92 days against *Erin's Hope's* 110-day voyage. The *New York Times* story concludes: "The voyage shows that the coast of Ireland cannot be patrolled by English gunboats so as to prevent the landing of considerable bodies of men. During the cruise of the *Plato* signal rockets were fired from on board ship and answered from on shore, and complete communication kept up . . . with those on shore." Perhaps it was to give circulation to this heartening picture that the *Plato* story was thought up.

So much for *Erin's Hope*. The Holland story belongs to a later stage of Fenianism. Of many accounts of the former Christian Brother's inventive genius, one of the best was the article published in *The Irish Times* of 8.xii.1964 under the name of Father Martin Coen. A shorter article by Malachy Hynes in the *Evening Press* of 29.viii.1958 gives a popular version of the inventor's efforts. The *Journal of Commerce* article of 4.ix.1963 by J. D. Scott gave a serious and accurate short account of Holland's work in the context of the naval balance of power of the time, but to obtain a really clear understanding of this fascinating subject, and to assess the true value of Holland's work as one of a number of exceptionally gifted and far-seeing naval engineers and architects, such as Dupuy de Lôme, Gustave Zédé, Max Laubeuf, Bourgeois and Brun in France, the Irish Episcopalian clergyman Garrett and Captain Reginald Bacon in Britain, and Nordenfelt in Sweden, it is necessary to turn to profounder studies such as the series *The Submarine Story*, published in the *Cammell Laird Magazine* in 1961 and 1962, various articles in the *Revue Maritime*, particularly those on Laubeuf in nos. 129 and 234, and, above all, to Herbert C. Fyfe's *Submarine Warfare* (Grant Richards, 1902). From these it is evident that, while C. W. Domville-Fife, in his authoritative *Submarines, Mines and Torpedoes* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1914), was correct to state that "the first naval submarine (*Gymnôte*) was launched in 1888, giving to France the honour of being the first Naval Power to adopt the submarine torpedo-boat as a vessel of war", Colonel Lawlor, in his *Irish Maritime Survey*, was fully justified in quoting Irish ex-submariner A. J. O'Brien







Twohig's judgement: "Holland's design embodied the principle of dynamically diving the vessel with positive buoyancy. The design also included two sets of propelling machinery, i.e. the internal combustion engine for surface cruising and an electric motor for under-water drive."

Holland was born at Liscannor, probably on 29 February, 1840. His father was a coastguard. Poor eyesight thwarted his ambition to go to sea. Fr. Coen says that an outstanding older colleague, Bro. Dominic Burke, encouraged his scientific bent, and helped him build a model submarine. While teaching at Dundalk (1869-73), he successfully demonstrated a model submarine in a bath. Bad health made him give up teaching, and he emigrated to Boston. In 1875 he was persuaded to offer plans for a submarine to the U.S. navy, whose secretary rejected them as "a fantastic scheme of a civilian landsman"—the sort of treatment that other great Irish inventor, Charles Parsons, got from that other hide-bound naval establishment, the British Admiralty, shortly after.

Holland now went to Devoy, the most influential of the Fenian exiles in America, and suggested that the movement finance him to build a vessel capable of challenging the overwhelming naval power of Britain, the base upon which British occupation of Ireland rested. To Devoy's credit, he saw the possibilities of the submarine. \$6,000 were provided to build an experimental boat, which was to be Holland No. 2 (Holland No. 1, 1875, 16' x 11'8" x 2", propelled by a screw actuated by a pedal Fife describes as "an under-water canoe"). I may say that though I have often seen it stated that Holland was connected with the Fenian movement even in Ireland, and certainly before 1876, I have never seen positive proof.

Holland No. 2 was 10' x 3'5" x 3', with a double shell, two rudders, and a 4 h.p. petrol engine. Holland experimented with her for two years. Meanwhile the Balkan crisis of 1877-8 was erupting, and a Russo-British war seemed likely. Not only did the Russian Black Sea fleet, inspired by the brilliant young Makarov, possibly Russia's greatest naval genius, prove conclusively against a much superior Turkish fleet the value of mosquito craft equipped with torpedoes, but the American Fenians began feverishly studying a number of naval projects. Condon and others were all for a revival of the privateer project; studies were made of schemes to land up to 10,000 men in Ireland with Russian help, and J. J. O'Kelly worked out what seems to have been a fully practicable plan to seize Gibraltar and hand it back to Spain (but the Spanish Government declined from lack of naval power to hold the place and the influential American Fenian Dr. Carroll did not see how "as liberals" the members of the movement could cooperate with a Spanish Government that was treating Cuba as Britain was treating Ireland). For all this see Devoy's *Postbag*, Vol. I, pp. 207 ff. By 23 December, 1877 the General Military Board, New York, felt confident to write to the Supreme Council of the I.R.B., Ireland: "The art of torpedo warfare is now in such an advanced condition that if properly employed the national forces ought to be able to paralyse in a great measure the movements of the Navy. We ought to be able to command some of the entrances to harbours, bays of the sea, as well as disembouchures of rivers." (*Ibidem*, p. 290). The movement at home was urged to look into this, and this was, of course, a very practical





suggestion for neutralizing the greatest weapon of the British, their navy: though I remain astonished at the persistent failure of the Fenians to do what the United Irishmen had so successfully done—appeal to the Irish seamen in the British Navy, about 15 per cent of 58,253 in 1867 and no doubt the same percentage ten years later, and to radical seamen in the same force, to mutiny and seize or at least immobilize a number of ships.

This at any rate was the atmosphere in which Holland was encouraged to go ahead with his famous Holland No. 3, the *Fenian Ram*. Begun in 1879 at the Delamater Iron Co's. yard, New York, she was completed in 1881. She was a boat 31' x 6' x 6', displacing 19 tons and driven by a 15 h.p. petrol engine. She was armed with an underwater cannon fired by compressed air. U.S. Admiral Hichborn wrote: "She was the first submarine since Bushnell's<sup>3</sup> time employing water-ballast and always retaining buoyancy, in which provision was made to secure a fixed centre of gravity and a fixed absolute weight. Moreover, she was the first buoyant submarine to be steered down and up inclines in the vertical plane by horizontal rudder action, as she was pushed forward by her motor, instead of being pushed up and down by vertically-acting mechanism. Her petroleum engine . . . was inefficient, and the boat therefore failed as a practical craft; but in her were demonstrated all the chief principles of successful brain-directed submarine navigation." (Fife, op. cit., pp. 246-7). (The *Gymnôte*, the first really successful motor-powered submarine, launched in the same decade, had a 55 h.p. electric engine, displaced 30 tons, and had the dimensions 59' x 5'9" x 6').

Associated with Holland in the construction of the *Fenian Ram* was John Breslin. He had devised Stephens's escape from Richmond Gaol, and organized the greatest of all the Fenian maritime successes, the *Catalpa's* rescue of six Fenian soldiers incarcerated in Western Australia, so brilliantly described by Seán Ó Luíng in *Freemantle Mission*, but alas there was not one Irish seaman involved in that affair.

Unhappily the *Ram*, though it caused great excitement and was more than once rumoured to have sailed against the British, became even in Devoy's eyes something of a white elephant, as she not only cost the movement a lot of money but was the cause of further splits in the already divided ranks of American Fenianism, one group at one time stealing and then abandoning the craft (she was put on exhibition in Madison Square, New York, in 1916 to raise money for the victims of the Easter Rising). Altogether \$60,000 were advanced by the movement for the Holland project, and undoubtedly this money made it possible in the end for the inventor to achieve ultimate success with his No. 9 (1898), the prototype, oddly enough, of British as well as U.S. navy submarines. For by 1898 Holland had long severed his connection with Fenianism. He died in 1914, just before events occurred that proved finally the usefulness of the submarine in war and the menace it represented to Britain.

Meanwhile, if Millen's report to Clan na Gael (Devoy's *Postbag*, I, p. 428) is to be credited, the movement in Ireland, which he visited in 1879, had done

3 A pioneer submariner of the U.S. Independence War, who died in 1826.





precious little to carry out the brilliant plans suggested by the Military Board in December 1877 (see above), even though the ingenious J. J. O'Kelly was making startling progress towards perfecting the torpedo, a weapon which had first been successfully demonstrated by the Austrian Navy and the English inventor Whitehead at the port of Ryeka twelve years earlier. Soon after O'Kelly became Parnellite M.P. for Roscommon, and Fenian interest in naval affairs declined sharply. The descendants of the Fenians who controlled our next insurrectionary movement had virtually no naval, nor indeed any kind of national maritime policy, and this was not only one of the reasons why their successes in 1916 and 1921 were only partial, but also a cause of the continuing failure of our people to see clearly their manifest destiny to be, as they once were, a maritime people.

It can indeed be argued that in the grim years that separated Young Ireland from the I.R.B., Davis from Stephens, Ireland lost sight of her maritime potential, and that the Fenian maritime outlook, even at its period of sharpest definition the late '70s and early '80s, was narrower than that of previous patriotic movements, Grattan's, Tone's, Davis's, and that this was one of the reasons why such naval actions as the Fenians actually tried to carry out were so rarely successful.

In his essay in *The Nation* on Foreign Travel Davis had written: "Before this generation dies, it must have made Ireland's rivers navigable, and its hundred harbours secure with beacon and pier, and thronged with seamen educated in naval schools, and familiar with every rig and every ocean."<sup>4</sup>

In 1862 James Stephens, writing as *A Silent Politician*, gave his movement and the world his idea of *Ireland in the Future*. It falls far short of Davis's grand vision. Nevertheless, Stephens did propose that we should have a "very highly paid" naval service, equipped with "as many vessels of moderate size as possible, heavily armed; and include a large proportion of steam frigates". No less than two million solid Victorian pounds would annually be spent on this force. Stephens hoped for some kind of French guarantee of Irish independence. Well informed about France—he translated Dickens into French—he must have watched with interest that country's dramatic challenge in the late '50s and early '60s to Britain's naval supremacy. In 1859 France had commissioned the steam frigate *Gloire*, the world's first iron-clad steam fighting ship, the great naval architect Dupuy de Lôme's extension of ideas successfully tried out in the Crimean War when French armoured floating batteries victoriously engaged Russian fortifications. For some months the *Gloire* could, single-handed, have triumphantly challenged the whole British Channel Fleet, and Britain had quickly to reply with a pair of ironclads, even larger, *Warrior* and *Black Prince* (see above). But, as Stephens may well have known, at this period French personnel was superior in many respects to what the British had in their fleets. This is made very clear in the last chapter of *H.M.S. "Hannibal" at Palermo and Naples*, by Admiral Rodney Mundy, commander of the Mediterranean Fleet (Murray, 1863), where the author, discussing his experience of the French navy in the Levant in 1861, remarks on the youthfulness of French high-ranking

<sup>4</sup> A practical indication of Young Ireland's maritime awareness was the despatch of Thomas D'Arcy McGee (a coastguard's son) in 1848 to Scotland to seize ships on the Clyde and sail them to Sligo.





officers, compared with the advanced age of their British counterparts, the excellence of French naval gunnery, the superiority of French over British petty officers, the much more serviceable boats of the French warships and the advantage they had, in pulling and sailing, over the British ships' boats.

A strong Irish navy backed by the powerful French fleet of the 1860's could indeed have guaranteed the independence of the Irish Republic, once established. It is all the more astonishing, therefore, that no serious steps were taken of a naval character when insurrection was being planned. Not only could an appeal have been made with a fair prospect of success to Irish and other radical elements in the British navy, but some kind of naval action could, one feels, have been systematically prepared. This was when the great Haulbowline dockyard was in the early stages of construction, and the movement even had John O'Connell of Cork working there to keep an eye on naval movements (information supplied by Lieutenant-Commander Brunicardi and Mr. McGrath of the *Cork Examiner*). Yet so far as I am aware no offensive action from on water was taken by Irish insurgents against the oppressor in any rebellious movement after the United Irishmen's Wexford chiefs armed oyster boats to patrol the coast in '98. This contrasts vividly with, for example, the readiness of Argentine, Chilean, Ecuadorian and Colombian rebels to use the sea, lakes and rivers against their Spanish masters, with innumerable incidents of Yugoslav patriots using ships and boats on the Danube and along the Dalmatian coast against Turkish, Austrian and Venetian oppressors—and with the ability of the Yugoslav national movement to foment a crippling mutiny in the Austrian Navy at Kotor base in February 1918. The Communard insurrectionary movement in France in 1871 was able to shake authority to its foundations not only because it had much more active sympathy from the maritime population of Bordeaux and especially Marseille than the Fenians were able to evoke in, say, Waterford or Cork, but also because of the imaginativeness of the Communard's Paris leaders in using gunboats on the Seine to check the advance of the forces of reaction (for all this see Lissagaray, *History of the Commune of 1871* (London, 1886), especially Chapter X, *Revue Maritime*, No. 208 (March 1964), article *Sous Les Ponts de Paris*, and *Revue Historique de l'Armée*, 1947, article by André Fabre).

I do not feel that this failure can be ascribed wholly to the efficiency of the British coastguard system here, though if somebody would write its history we might learn a lot. It is significant perhaps too that our 1867 rebels made a number of attacks on coastguard stations, as well as proposing to seize the newly-opened Atlantic cable station at Valentia; but so far as my inadequate information so far goes the attacks seem to have been at least as much for the sake of procuring arms as to neutralize these important enemy maritime outposts.

The insurrectionary movement of the '60s can certainly point to no great naval achievement to hearten our island people, and one of its more lamentable failures was the Campo Bello expedition, already alluded to. This was the idea of the Roberts wing of American Fenianism which believed the Empire could be dealt a mortal blow by the overthrow of British rule in Canada (where there were indeed important dissident French-speaking, Indian and Irish elements, for whom Smith O'Brien had eloquently pleaded at Westminster in the previous generation





during debates on Lord Durham's famous mission. These elements erupted in 1870 and 1885 under the courageous Louis Riel, who met and kept touch with Devoy, and were well able to make tactical use of the great waterways of Manitoba, as is evident even from the hostile but detailed accounts given in *Battles of the Nineteenth Century* (Cassell), Vol. IV, pp. 500-507 and Vol. II (eyewitness) pp. 664-675 and 721-739).

The Canadian project was, however, not well-handled, above all that part of it that envisaged the seizure of Campo Bello I., New Brunswick, near the Maine border. B. Dorian Killian was put in charge of this, with a steamer, the *Ocean Spray*, and 500 stand of arms. She reached Eastport, Maine, on April 17, 1866, and the arms were promptly seized and the expeditionary force disarmed by U.S. General Meade and Commander Cooper of U.S.S. *Winooski*. Father D'Arcy acidly remarks: "The New York *Herald* treated this farce as a major military operation." The *Ocean Spray* was later sold for \$4,000. It is clear that division of leadership and absence of clear military and political objectives helped to nullify both the *Ocean Spray* and *Erin's Hope* ventures.

It is however true that the British Navy was forced to give a lot more attention to Canada than it otherwise would have. The *Illustrated London News* of 5.i.1867 reports: "The Canadian frontier is now strictly guarded . . . against Fenian aggression, and it is said that two British gunboats have left Quebec to convoy the Cunard steamers." The issue of the same for 20.iv.1867 describes at length, with illustration, the Canadian winter sojourn of H.M.S. *Aurora*, flagship in 1863-4 of the famous Irish Admiral and Polar explorer Leopold McClintock during the Dano-German war when he was protecting the neutrality of then British Heligoland. The paper says: "The attempted invasion of Canada by bands of Fenians early in the summer last year necessitated the presence of several of Her Majesty's ships of war in the St. Lawrence." A curious sequel to all this was the issue in 1899 of a medal with clasp to officers and men who served in Canadian waters between 1865 and 1867 in H.M.S. *Aurora* (35) screw, Capt. de Horsey, and H.M.S. *Pylades* (21), *Niger* (13), *Rosario* (11), *Heron*, *Britomart* and *Cherub* (gunboats), and six hired gunboats ("on the river St. Lawrence, and Lakes Ontario, Erie and Huron. Their services were not, for the most part, of a very exciting character, being mainly of a preventive nature"—Laird Clowes, Vol. 7 of his British naval history, cited to me in a letter of 8.ii.1967 from the Naval Library, British Ministry of Defence).

In the early 1880's O'Donovan Rossa's group was the only one that maintained a regular interest in upsetting the British at sea. He had ideas of attacking British merchantmen in U.S. harbours and he claimed to have sponsored a torpedo attack on H.M.S. *Lord Warden* in the Firth of Forth in January and to have engineered the destruction of H.M.S. *Doterel* (1,137 tons, 900 h.p., 6 guns), in the Magellan Strait in April 1881. The *Doterel* is illustrated, and the accident described, in the *Illustrated London News* of May 14, 1881; 145 lives were lost. (These events are mentioned in *Devoy's Postbag*, Vol. II, p. 30, p. 24.) The official enquiry into the loss of the *Doterel* established that two explosions took place, but attributed them to badly ventilated bunkers. Laird Clowes, *The Royal Navy, A History*, Vol. 7, does not suggest anyone officially ever supposed the





Fenians to blame, but says the real cause of the disaster was never discovered. There is, Miss Vivienne Heath of the British Ministry of Defence Naval Library informs me, nothing in that institution to suggest an attack on the *Lord Warden*. The well-informed *Illustrated London News* is equally silent in its issues for January 1881.

In December 1884 William Mackey Lomasney, the celebrated "Captain Mackay" or "Mackey" who baffled the British for months after the collapse of the '67 rising by a series of raids on coastguard stations, was killed on a launch on the Thames trying to blow up London Bridge. A consistent believer in "direct action", but an opponent of Rossa's variety because of the danger of killing innocent English people and stirring up anti-Irish feeling, he was one of the most indomitable and sympathetic of the Fenians, and his last action, in which Mr. McGrath of the *Cork Examiner* informs me, John O'Connell, mentioned above, was also killed, may be classified as a naval action. The approach to London Bridge by launch is a memorable episode. It was in the Lomasney spirit that the last Fenian naval action was undertaken on 21.iv.1900 during the Boer War—Luke Dillon's attempt to dynamite Lock 24 on the Welland Canal, Canada.

A few other connections between Fenians and the sea are worth record. John Boyle O'Reilly, who escaped from Australia in the New England whaler *Gazelle*,<sup>5</sup> obtained work in Boston on his arrival with the famous Inman transatlantic passenger line. The job lasted five weeks. He was then dismissed on representations from London. (T. J. Kiernan, *The Irish Exiles in Australia*, Dublin, 1954, and Devoy's *Postbag*, especially Vol. I.) Devoy and his friends, as is evident from the *Postbag*, preferred to travel and above all to direct their correspondence by ships of the Compagnie Générale Transatlantique to avoid interception by the British. The first man to suggest the rescue of the Freemantle prisoners by ship was T. McC. Fennell, a Co. Clare Fenian who had taken a leading part in the raid on Kilbaha coastguard station on 5.iii.1867. The Admiral Crowne, Russian naval commander in the Adriatic in 1877, mentioned in a *Postbag* letter (Vol. I, p. 264), as being in contact with an Irish explosive chemist of Fenian sympathies, was a member of the well known Hiberno-Russian naval family, Cronin. W. F. Roantree, Devoy's predecessor as Fenian organizer in the British army, had served in the U.S. Navy. Jerome Collins, the real founder of Clan na Gael, a Cork man, lost his life in a celebrated maritime disaster. He accompanied the U.S. Navy's *Jeannette* Arctic expedition in 1879-82 representing Gordon Bennett (of yacht *Henrietta* above) and his New York *Herald*. Three other Polar exploratory ships were in the Arctic at the same time, *Kara*, *Hope* and *Willem Barents*. All four were endeavouring to develop the exceptional success of the Swede Nordenskjöld in his great 1878-9 North East Passage expedition. None achieved anything like as much. The *Willem Barents* and *Jeannette* were lost (in widely separated areas). The whole *Jeannette* expedition was monumentally mishandled by Captain de Long of the U.S. Navy, and the

<sup>5</sup> On his way to Australia in the notorious prison ship *Hougoumont*, O'Reilly produced a ship's newspaper.





U.S. Navy's prevarications over the demand for a genuine enquiry were the subject of a typhonic attack by Devoy: "nothing that would prove charges made by a civilian against a naval officer was tolerated" (*Irish Nation*, 23.ii.1884). Collins, who was undoubtedly shockingly treated on board the *Jeannette*, died of exposure after she was abandoned. His body was eventually brought to Cork and buried in a north-facing grave to recall his last great adventure.

Finally, the only genuine full-time seaman I can find in all the story of the Fenianism of the '60's is the attractive figure of John Flood of Wexford, who was in the hooker in which Stephens escaped from Dublin in 1866. The vessel belonged to de Lacy Garton, later a Home Rule member of Liverpool City Council whose maritime connections facilitated smuggling here of *United Ireland* when it was banned at home in 1881. The hooker ran into bad weather and lost her tiller. She had to anchor in Belfast Lough. All accounts agree that it was Flood's skill that brought the hooker and her important passenger safe to Scotland, whence he escaped to France. Flood went to Chester where the first abortive attempt to raid the castle armoury was called off, thence by sea to Whitehaven, and, with two Fenian companions, in a collier brig to Dublin. Endeavouring to slip ashore by boat they were spotted and arrested. Flood gave the name Phillips. Tried under the Suspension of Habeas Corpus Act 1866 in February 1867, Flood was sentenced to transportation. Butt defended him: Butt to the informer Corydon—"Did you ever hear that he was engaged at sea?" Superintendent Ryan reported at the trial that he was called "the smugler (*sic*) Flood" and was "thoroughly acquainted with the coast navigation of Ireland". (I owe these details to Mr. Seán Ó Luíng.) Flood settled in Australia, dying in Queensland in 1909. He had the distinction of forming the first branch in Australia of the Land League.

If John Flood is the only tenuous genuine link between the Fenian Brotherhood and the great international brotherhood of the sea, he is still a most worthy one. All who have written of him speak without qualification in his praise. It is one of the saddest pages in the story of a great national movement that it did not attract more Irish seamen of Flood's type, that among its offspring there was not an Irish Republican marine as well as an Irish Republican Army. Not for nothing, it seems, did Stephens, in *Ireland of the Future*, for all he proposed giving the Irish Navy five Senators in a House of 150, nevertheless postulate its subordination to the army ministry. Davis would not have agreed.

#### FOOTNOTE

The British Navy as "The Silent Service" may well have thought fit to let the great British public suppose from its official pronouncements that in the summer of 1867 it was interested in nothing more serious than the length of side whiskers. The following official documents tell another story; they were received after this article was set up in print.

Adm. 53/9948, log of H.M.S. *Rainbow*:

15.v.67: Crookhaven. Weighed and proceeded to sea under steam in chase of a suspicious vessel; proved to be a French brig.

17.v.67: From Donny Cove all possible sail in chase of a suspicious steamer which proved to be the *Holyrood* of Limerick.





Adm. 1/6009, Cap. P. 102, H.M.S. *Donegal*, Rock Ferry.

13.iii.67: Captain Paynter to Commodore, Controller General, London:

"Fenians in Manchester to rise, fire docks, seize river steamers, then ocean ones and join a Fenian squadron expected on S.E. coast of Ireland on Friday or Saturday next."

Adm. 1/6002. L. 557. No. 401.

12.iv.67: 4. "Their Excellencies the Lords Justices have requested the Coast Guard in Ireland may exercise great vigilance as suspicious persons have lately landed in Ireland and it is not improbable that other attempts of the same nature may be anticipated."

Adm. 1/6002. No. 433. L. 551; from Ernest A. Stubbs, Commander R.N., Dingle, to Rear Admiral Frederick, H.M.S. *Wivern*, Queenstown:

28.vi.67: Reports suspicious brigantine off Dingle on 24 June and another or same "hovering" well out to sea off Blaskets on 27 June, and that same or similar vessel had been seen several times during the week "a considerable distance off the coast".

Adm. 1/6002. No. 401. L. 557:

11.vi.67: Confidential letter from G. V. Goold, Resident Magistrate, Waterford to C. in C., Queenstown, transmitted by him 12.vi.67 with Daily Letter to Admiralty—"Information that the brigantine that had landed 30 'supposed Fenians' near Dungarvan about 10 days ago is in reality a Fenian Privateer named the *Jackmel*, the name is on the stern but nearly illegible;" had left New York April 13 (*sic*) and sighted Sligo May 19. "Is 112 tons, no after topmast, the fore main yard new and unpainted, rest black, has 5,000 stand of arms and 200,000 rounds of ammunition, 51 (*sic*) men on board . . . and a train laid to the magazine, with orders to blow her up and take to the boats if chased. A second vessel supposed to be a steamer was to leave in 6 weeks from New York for Ireland. The informant [? Buckley; it would seem so from the general accuracy of the information—perhaps O'Mahony, Kelly, Powell and Co. *had* promised to send a steamer and not been able: Kavanagh, 'M'Groom' and the rest would suppress this naturally—J. de C. I.] thinks she is on the coast of Cork."

Adm. 1/6002. No. 433. L. 551.

29.vi.67; From Rear Admiral Queenstown to Admiralty: Reference to confidential orders to watch for brigantine *Jackmel* (*sic* this time).

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